

# After the industrial revolution

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This was a revolution with a difference – the Industrial Revolution. In 1709, Abraham Darby I pioneered the smelting of iron with coke in a gorge known as Coalbrookdale on the banks of the River Severn in Shropshire. From this beginning, the Severn Valley became the most important centre of ironmaking in the world, and Ironbridge Gorge, as it became known, was the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. Here were made the world's first iron rails, wheels and boats, and possibly the first iron bridge.

Two hundred and fifty years later, most of the mines and furnaces are silent, but the town is as busy as it ever was; the difference today is that many of its inhabitants are visiting rather than resident. Ironbridge is now one of Europe's largest museums, and the valley has been designated a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. There are 14 such sites in the United Kingdom, including Stonehenge, The Tower of London and Hadrian's Wall.

## Ironbridge today

The site covers some six square miles and consists of six separate main museums and several smaller sites spread over the whole valley. It is living history on a giant scale and unlikely to be seen in one visit. For this reason, visitors can purchase an undated ticket which is valid indefinitely until each museum site has been visited once. There are no rules on how to proceed, but you will see the following:

## Iron bridge and town

This impressive bridge – with its original tollhouse – was cast in 1799 and is the focal point of the whole valley. A tourist information centre near the bridge will provide all the information you need. The Museum of the River, featuring a 40-foot model of the Gorge as it was in 1796,

gives an introduction to the industrial history of the area.

## Coalbrookdale and the Museum of Iron

The deep river chasm was known as Coalbrookdale before it was called Ironbridge. The Museum of Iron and the Darby Furnace brings these achievements to life. A visit to Rosehill House and Dale House, formerly homes of the Quaker ironmasters, will give an insight into the way of life and possessions of the time.

The Long Warehouse, alongside the Museum of Iron, is where the museum library and the Elton collection are housed. They hold a large collection of industrial art, photographs, books, prints and drawings.

## Jackfield Tile Museum

In the late 19th century, two of the world's largest decorative tile works were established here. One, Craven Dunnill, now houses a museum of historic tiles. You can even design your own tile panel at a tile workshop. A geology gallery explains what lies beneath the Ironbridge Gorge.

## Blists Hill Open Air Museum

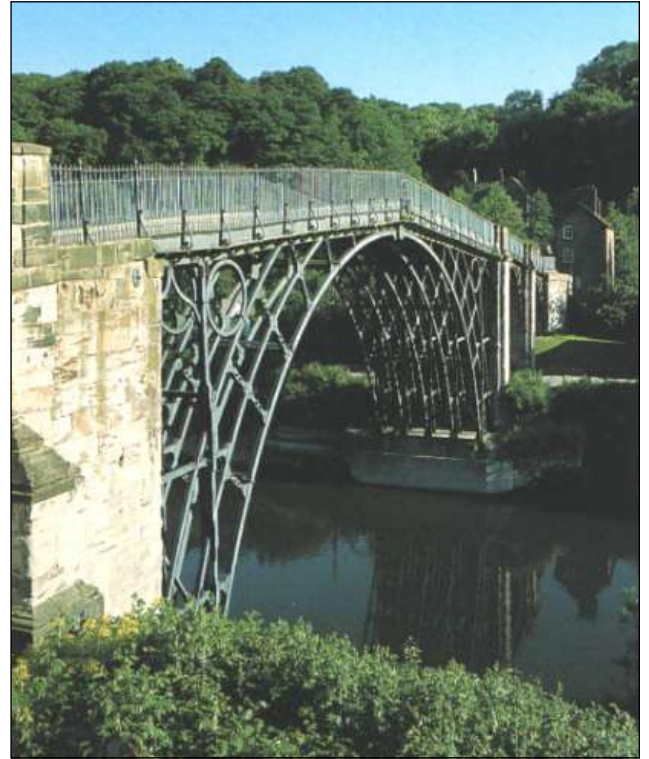
A recreation of town life at the turn of the last century occupies a 50-acre site. There are shops, cottages, workshops, steam-powered machines, animals and railway sidings. You can watch hot iron being poured in the foundry and enjoy the children's street games. Costumed staff will be on hand to explain what life was like in those days and to answer questions.

## Coalport China Museum

Coalport China was founded by John Rose 200 years ago. Today, the site houses a stunning collection of Coalport china and displays on the people who created it. China-making workshops are held.

## How to get there

The Ironbridge Gorge Museum is located to the south of Telford in



Courtesy photo

## The Ironbridge at Coalbrookdale.

Shropshire. To reach Ironbridge by car, there are signs from the M54 motorway via the M6 motorway. As Telford is quite a distance from RAF Lakenheath, it might be something to include when you are visiting Wales, which is just to the west.

## Parking

Parking is free in all locations except the town of Ironbridge, where you pay and display.

## Facilities

There is a tearoom in Rosehill House and coffee shop in the Museum of Iron (Coalbrookdale). South of the Iron Bridge, you will find a picnic area and nature walks. There is also picnic areas at Coalport China Museum and Blists Hill Open Air Museum, in addition to refreshments, hot meals and snacks at The New Inn, The Forest Glen and the Entrance Cafe.

## Admission prices

Tickets are £9 for adults, £5.30 for children and students and £28 for families of two adults and up to five children under 18. It is possible to pay admission to individual museums, though this will work out more expensive.



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